

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 IO-13 MCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00
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R 171923Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6236
INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMCONSUL BELFAST

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 07824

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PINR PINS PINT UK EI
SUBJECT: VIOLENCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND: LULL CONTINUES
BUT PESSIMISTIC FORECAST

THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE WAS PREPARED BY CONGEN BELFAST
MAY 12.

SUMMARY: THE RELATIVE LULL IN TERRORISM IN NI THAT BEGAN
WITH THE LA MON MASSACRE OF FEB 17 CONTINUES. INTELLI-
GENCE OFFICERS BELIEVE THAT THE PROVISIONAL IRA'S
CAPABILITY FOR MORE EXTENSIVE ACTION REMAINS BUT AT THE
MOMENT PIRA IS HAVING PROBLEMS OF LEADERSHIP, ORGANIZA-
TION AND TACTICS. PIRA'S LONG TERM POTENTIAL FOR MAKING
SERIOUS TROUBLE REMAINS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE LULL: AN OFFICIAL VISITOR FROM WASHINGTON AND
THE CONGEN RECEIVED AN UNUSUALLY FRANK INTELLIGENCE
BRIEFING MAY 10 AT NI ARMY HEADQUARTERS. EVIDENTLY PIRA
STILL HAS NOT RECOVERED ITS BALANCE AFTER THE LA MON
BLAST INCENDIARY DISASTER OF MID-FEBRUARY (BELFAST 32).
CRITICIZED BY ITS HEADQUARTERS IN DUBLIN AND AWARE OF
PUBLIC SENSITIVITIES AROUSED BY THE MASSACRE, THE LOCAL
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PIRA IN THESE THREE MONTHS HAS ALMOST ABANDONED ITS FIRE
BOMB CAMPAIGN AGAINST COMMERCIAL ESTABLISHMENTS. ATTACKS
ON MILITARY AND POLICE FORCES NEVERTHELESS CONTINUE
(SEVERAL MORE KILLINGS AND WOUNDINGS IN THE PAST MONTH),
AND A FEW DAYS AGO PIRA BEGAN USING SMALL BOMBS AGAINST
SUCH INFRASTRUCTURE INSTALLATIONS AS RAIL LINES AND
EQUIPMENT, TELEPHONE LINES, AND ELECTRICITY PYLONS.

2. SUPPLIES, MONEY AND MEN: THE ARMY JUDGES THAT PIRA IS NOT HAMPERED BY LACK OF RESOURCES. DESPITE THE REDUCTION OF SUPPLIES FROM THE U.S., PIRA HAS PLENTY OF ARMS: SECURITY FORCES HAVE ESTABLISHED PIRA USE OF SOME 845 HIGH VELOCITY WEAPONS THAT HAVE NOT BEEN PICKED UP; 61 PERCENT OF THE 845 ARE AMERICAN-MADE. SECURITY FORCES HAVE CAPTURED AND IDENTIFIED TWO M-60 MACHINEGUNS AS COMING FROM A RAIDED U.S. ARSENAL IN MASSACHUSETTS AND ASSUME PIRA HAS THE OTHER FIVE GUNS THAT WERE TAKEN (SEE DUBLIN 1499). THEY ARE ALSO WORRIED ABOUT SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILES.

3. DESPITE THE IMPORTANT CUTOFF OF ILLEGAL U.S. MONEY, PIRA STILL CAN PAY FOR WHAT IT NEEDS. SOURCES INCLUDE ROBBERIES IN THE SOUTH OF IRELAND AND VARIOUS RAKEOFFS IN THE NORTH. PIRA ORGANIZATION HAS BEEN TIGHTENED UP, BUT THERE ARE STILL PLENTY OF RECRUITS, AND MANY VETERANS REJOIN AS THEY FINISH PRISON TERMS.

4. PIRA OFF BALANCE: TAKING A RETROSPECTIVE LOOK AT PIRA'S RESURGENCE LAST AUTUMN AND WINTER, AN EXPERIENCED INTELLIGENCE OFFICER ASCRIBED AS A MAJOR FACTOR THE RELEASE FROM PRISON IN NI OF TWO SENIOR AND CAPABLE PIRA LEADERS: BELFAST BRIGADE COMMANDER GERRY ADAMS AND HIS ADJUTANT (THE LATTER'S NAME ESCAPED US). PIRA HEADQUAR-
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TERS GAVE THEM MORE AUTONOMY IN LOCAL OPERATIONS, AND THEY REORGANIZED THEIR NI FORCES INTO THE TIGHTER, FOUR-SIX MAN ACTIVE SERVICE UNITS (ASU) THAT WERE HARDER TO PENETRATE. CORRESPONDINGLY, PIRA SUFFERED WHEN THE POLICE ARRESTED ADAMS IN THE AFTERMATH OF LA MON. THE SECURITY FORCES HOPE THE POLICE CAN MAKE STICK IN COURT CHARGES AGAINST HIM OF PIRA MEMBERSHIP (A PRISON OFFENSE) BASED ON PUBLIC STATEMENTS MADE IN DUBLIN AS A LEADER OF THE PROVISIONAL SINN FEIN (PIRA'S POLITICAL ARM).

5. OTHER ARRESTS AFTER LA MON LED TO PENETRATION OF ASUS, WHICH IN TURN HAS LED PIRA LEADERS TO QUESTION THE VALUE OF MAINTAINING THE ASU-BASED ORGANIZATION: ONCE ONE MEMBER IS CAUGHT, AND TALKS, THE OTHERS CAN BE PICKED UP OR HAVE TO GO ON THE RUN. MOREOVER, THE LEANER AND TIGHTER NEW ORGANIZATION HAS LESS ROOM FOR YOUNG RECRUITS, AND THERE ARE INDICATIONS OF DISSATISFACTION IN PIRA'S CONSTITUENCY. THESE FACTORS HAVE LED DUBLIN HEADQUARTERS TO RESTRICT THE BELFAST ORGANIZATION'S AUTONOMY--EVEN INTERFERING IN TACTICAL DECISIONS--WHICH HAS CAUSED RESENTMENT IN LOCAL RANKS.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 07824

6. PIRA RESTRAINT? THE SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICER
RAISED A SUBJECT THAT BOTHERS HIM, AS IT DOES US: FOR
ALL ITS HATE OF THE BRITS AND LACK OF SCRUPLE, PIRA HAS
NOT DONE MANY THINGS THAT WOULD MAKE THE SECURITY FORCES'
TASK MUCH MORE DIFFICULT. FOR EXAMPLE, IT HAS NOT
SYSTEMATICALLY ATTACKED SOLDIERS ON REGULAR ADMINISTRA-
TIVE DUTIES (E.G., PERHAPS 20 DAILY AIRPORT RUNS FROM
GENERAL HEADQUARTERS AT LISBURN, NEAR BELFAST), MILITARY
FAMILIES OR PRISON GUARDS, TRIED TO KILL THE COMMANDING
GENERAL (WHO LIVES IN AN EASILY ACCESSIBLE AREA), OR
ENGAGED IN KIDNAPPING. AND DESPITE THEIR CONSTANT
TECHNICAL IMPROVEMENTS, PIRA APPARENTLY HAS NEVER
EMPLOYED THE KIND OF EXPERT WHO WITH SMALL QUANTITIES OF
EXPLOSIVES COULD DO MUCH GREATER DAMAGE TO PROPERTY THAN
IT HAS SO FAR. THE OFFICER PUT THIS DOWN TO A KIND OF
LOGIC HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND. WE ADD AS A POSSIBLE
FACTOR PIRA RESTRAINT--BOTH FOR OPERATIONAL AND PUBLIC
RELATIONS REASONS.

7. LOYALIST PARAMILITARIES: THE BRIEFING OFFICER PUT
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THE ORGANIZED STRENGTH OF THE ULSTER DEFENSE ASSOCIATION AT 7000-8000, AND OF THE PROSCRIBED ULSTER VOLUNTEER FORCE AT ABOUT 200 HARD CADRE. UDA LEADERS DO NOT WANT THE ORGANIZATION TO LOSE ITS LEGAL STATUS AND THEREFORE TRY TO CONTAIN PRESSURES FOR VIOLENT ACTION. UVF HARD MEMBERS ARE "RUTHLESS PSYCHOTICS" CAPABLE OF ANY ACT, BUT THE POLICE STILL HAVE THEM THUMBED DOWN. THEY OCCASIONALLY HIT REPUBLICAN ACTIVISTS AND CATHOLICS. IN CONTRAST TO PIRA, THE LOYALISTS ARE NOTORIOUSLY INEFFICIENT, BUT THEY CAN "BRING HMG TO ITS KNEES" (WITNESS THE MAY 1974 GENERAL STRIKE) IF THEY ARE ABLE TO COALESCE THE PARTIES AND WORKERS AROUND A POLITICAL ISSUE.

8. COMMENT: A DISCOURAGING ASSESSMENT. THERE ARE NUANCES IN THE ANALYSES OF NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE EXPERTS, THE POLICE, AND THE ARMY, AND SOME WOULD SAY THAT MILITARY INTELLIGENCE UNDERSTANDS NOTHING. BUT THE ABOVE LINE OF THOUGHT ON THE PROVISIONALS APPEARS REASONABLE. IT RESULTS, HOWEVER, IN THE STATEMENT THAT MILITARY INTELLIGENCE (WITH ITS 1,000 MEN OUT OF 13,500 TROOPS) PROBABLY KNOWS AS MUCH ABOUT PIRA'S SHORT TERM INTENTIONS AS PIRA DOES: I.E., PRACTICALLY NOTHING. AND THE LONGER TERM JUDGMENT IS EQUALLY PESSIMISTIC: OUR BRIEFER SAW NO REASON WHY PIRA SHOULD NOT CONTINUE SIGNIFICANT TERRORIST ACTIVITY INDEFINITELY.

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